



Can't We Play A Game? Using Games to Motivate!

How many times have you heard your students say, "Can't we play a game?" or "How come we never get to have any fun?" Well, read on. You'll never have to hear that again because I'm going to share with you how to create a learning game that works. I've been doing this type of motivation education for 20 years and if I can do, you can do it too.

The simplest way to create a game is to:

- Choose a target
- Choose something to throw at the target
- Determine point values

Just follow these simple steps:

First, pick a target. I always, humorously yet seriously, make a point of stating that I am not a target nor is anyone else in the room! Make sure that the target is placed up high enough so that all your students can see while others are throwing. If necessary, I usually use a table placed in the front of the room. Some simple and easy targets (and I'm all about making it simple and easy!) are:

- A clean waste paper basket
- An empty cardboard box
- The top of a table
- A chair
- A piece of paper taped to the top of a table.
- A circle(s) drawn on the board
- A piece(s) of paper taped to the board or wall
- A poster on the wall

Next, pick an object you can throw that will not inflict injury should it accidentally hit someone. For example:

- A wadded up piece of paper
- A Frisbee®
- A Koosh® ball
- A bean bag
- A hacky sack
- A soft ball made for use in swimming pools

As you can see, as you use your imagination, the choices for targets and objects to throw are endless, and they can cost you nothing! The price is definitely right, wouldn't you agree?!

Now, you're ready to assign the points you will receive when you:

- Hit the target
- Almost hit the target
- Completely miss the target

It is very important that students get points every time they throw, no matter whether they hit or miss the target! This is key! By doing this, your students will always feel successful because they will always be successful! Who wouldn't want to do something that they were always successful at?

They will ask to play your game over and over again, if only for this reason alone. All my games have this basic premise, and that's one of the reasons they all work. You can find out more about my over 30 active learning strategies (motivation education games) in my book, **How to Motivate the Unmotivated Student™**.

Back to assigning points. The amounts are up to you and your age group. Let's say that you're throwing a wadded up piece of paper at an empty shoebox on the table in front of the room. (I have used this for years, by the way, and the kids love it. It always works.) The simplest point system would be:

- 3 points if the paper lands and stays in the shoebox
- 2 points if it stays on the table
- 1 point if it lands on the floor

Now you're ready to determine the placement of the throwing line. I use a piece of masking tape on the floor or a chair to stand behind. Make the line very close to the target. For the game I just described, I put the throwing line (or chair) about 3- 4 feet from the target. Too close you say? Not so. Your goal is for everyone to have a better than average chance of hitting the target. You want to make it easy, without making it insultingly so. And even with it 3-4 feet away, everyone won't be able to hit it. I always mention, that it may look easy, but it's not. (This helps assuage the bruised egos of some of those who may miss and just happen to be on the basketball team!) Then I demonstrate how to do it. There are no guarantees for me hitting it either!

Next, I divide the class into teams of 2, 3, or 4. My preference is teams of 3 or 4 for this game. Give each team a team number. Assign a student from each team to be the first team leader, and give each team leader one piece of colored paper to serve as the team's score sheet and answer sheet. I tell the class that the team leader position continually rotates during the game so everyone will get at least one chance to be leader. (You can have them use a piece of binder paper for a score card if you wish, but I like the colored paper because then I can easily see who the team leader is.)

Let's say that you have 9 teams of 4 in your class. Have team leaders from teams 1-3 come up to the line and throw one time each.

Option: Time permitting, you can give them more than 1 throw each and then pick the highest score, or the sum of all their throws, or the product of 2 throws. I think you get the idea.

The leaders see what points they got, return to their seats, and record their points on their score sheet. Repeat for teams 4-6, and then 7-9. Remind them these are possible points. To keep them, the leader must write the correct answer to the following content question that you are going to ask them. If they get the answer wrong, they will get a 0.

Option: You can design your point system so that even if they get the answer wrong, they can get half the points they got on their throw.

Next, you say or write a question, each team confers, the team leaders write the answer on the score sheet and then stand up to signify that the team is ready. You call for each team leader, in turn, to read their team answer. Tell the correct answer as you go and have them keep their points if the answer is correct, or change their points to a 0 if incorrect. Check the written answers of each team when you feel you need to in order to keep them honest.

- Options:**
1. If you have a lot of time and/or you don't want them up and down out of their seats as much, you can have each leader throw as described above. Then, use that same point value for the next 2 - 5 questions.
 2. Have all the students write the question and answer on their binder paper. Or, write the answer with the information from the question included in the answer. This paper becomes their notes. The leader still also writes the answer on the score sheet to denote that it is the official team answer.
Note: If the answers are rather long, I don't have the leader rewrite the answer on the score sheet.)

The leaders pass the score sheet to the next person in their team who then becomes the leader.

Repeat the procedure mentioned above: leaders come up and throw, they return to their seats and record the points, the teacher asks a question, teams confer, leaders stand to signify their team is ready. The teacher asks each leader to read their answer and allocates points accordingly.

Play as long as time allows. It's important to make sure that you have enough time to make sure that everyone in each team has the opportunity to be leader at least once before you're out of time.

At the end, the teams total their points. The teacher asks the leaders to stand and say their points, and records them on the board. Everyone can then see how they placed. At this point, you can have everyone give themselves a round of applause for doing such a good job and/or give rewards.

An important aspect of this type of strategy is that because of the “luck of the throw” factor, the same “smart” team does not always win. It levels the playing field. Now any team can win! This important factor keeps kids wanting to play again and again.

Now, simply by following these quick and easy steps, you can create your own game with the confidence that it’s going to work. Your students will all want to participate, they’ll be learning, and having fun!